

Sunday 5

Many, many years ago in a seminary the priest in charge of the new recruits would speak to them about different types of personalities. There were four prominent types, I believe, but I can remember only three of them: the melancholic, the lethargic, and the sanguine. Melancholic personalities would quickly identify with our first reading today taken from the Book of Job. For them life is a drudgery filled with sleepless nights spent worrying about bills that cannot be paid and days lived without any reason for hope that things will be better in the future, and all lived under the awareness of the shortness of life and its unavoidable end, death. The scriptures speak often of living under the shadow of death. That is an image native to the melancholic personality. The lethargic person is the one who does not seem able to get started in any reasonable way. The sanguine person was the happy person. The word sanguine is a form of the Latin word for blood, sanguis. Hence it must have been thought that if one's blood was working well, it produced the happy person. That may not be far from the truth. And the fourth type? What is the person who was too full of energy and therefore prone to be overactive and perhaps at times even angry. And was there a fifth? If not, there should have been. It would have included people who struggled constantly and often

unsuccessfully to control their sensuality, whether at table or in matters sexual.

I don't suppose this breakdown of personalities is found in contemporary literature, despite its apparent appeal to common sense. And most of us would no doubt add that we all share in different degrees in all of these categories and find that one type predominates in us on one day and another on another day. The melancholic, indeed tragic, texts of Job fit us on one day, but not on another.

What about the Lord? Dare we apply these personality types to him? What do we see in him when we read the Gospels, our only source for looking into his personality? How do we read them? How do we understand him? Does the fact that he died young affect our understanding of him? Did it affect his own understanding of himself? Scriptures scholars, I suspect, would tell us that such questions are foreign to the Gospel texts themselves. They were not attempts to psychoanalyze the Lord. So we are imposing our questions on the texts. Nevertheless, is it not correct to say that the Gospels want to tell us about the Lord, about what he did and said, and that when we listen to what they tell us about his words and actions, we get a picture of what he was like as a

person. We know that he could be angry. That comes out often in his dealings with the scribes and Pharisees. We know that he could be touched by the sufferings of others. That is a dominating characteristic of his personality. His response to the people in the desert who have no food, his response to the widow accompanying her dead son to his grave, his response to the father pleading with him to save his daughter. All over the Gospels we meet a Jesus moved with compassion, that is, moved in his stomach, by the sufferings of people. And his reality consciousness. He knows that things are not going to go well for him. He tells his disciples that, but they don't believe him. But he not only believes it; he knows it and he accepts it as the way he must go.

Our Gospel for today taken from the first chapter of Mark's Gospel is often described as "a day in the life of the Lord." He has called his first disciples. He has gone to the synagogue and there cured a man possessed by an unclean spirit. Then he goes to Peter's house and finds that Peter's mother-in-law is sick, and he cures her. I have often felt that there was a little bit of self-interest in this cure. If she hadn't been cured, there would not have been any dinner, and it was time for dinner. And, once cured, she prepares it. And when evening comes, the whole town is at the door. The Sabbath is over, so they now come and ask him to cure their sick. He does so.

Time for bed. But Jesus gets up early the next morning and goes off to pray. Peter finds him and says to him: “Everyone is looking for you!” Of course they are. He can heal them. But he tells Peter that he has to go to the other villages nearby. That is why he has come, that is his purpose, his mission. And so he does: “So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.”

A young man with a mission, on a mission. We are not told here what he says, but we are told what he does. He cures people. Behind his curing there must have been a sadness seeing that people were so sick. So a bit of melancholy. But there was such energy on display here. No lethargy. No time for sensuality. Maybe not even much time for relaxing, for enjoying the meal. The crowds are at the door, waiting to be healed.

Pope Francis describes the church as a hospital, a place where people go to be healed. That sounds very much on target with this picture of a day in the life of Jesus presented in Mark’s first chapter. May we, the church, be such! The more we can do that, the more we will be able to cure the wound which has affected our church so seriously these last twenty years or more, the wound

inflicted on children by us, the clergy, the ones especially called in the church to act on the Lord's behalf, that is, to be healers.

Permanent removal from ministry, even for one offense committed decades ago, and a life of prayer and penitence are the rooms which bishops and priests who have offended must now occupy in the hospital of the church. Such a life is a plea for forgiveness sought from those whom they have offended. Forgiveness is a hard gift to give for those whose innocence was violated. But if they do not give it, then they remain outside the hospital of healing. But if by the grace of the Lord they can offer it, then both they and their offenders are embraced within the healing power of the Lord.